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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, January, 1898.

DANTE'S INFLUENCE ON MILTON.

MR. MASSON in his life of Milton expresses himself in no sparing terms concerning the efforts which have been made to prove that Milton borrowed largely from his predecessors. It certainly is not my purpose here to cast the slightest doubt on Milton's originality in the conception and carrying out of the *Paradise Lost*, but that the poem shows many traces of the influence of other great poets, at least in language, metaphors and certain ideas, cannot be disputed. Mr. Masson himself admits this and says :

"Original as the poem is, original in its entire conception, and in every portion and passage, it is full of *flakes*,—we can express it no otherwise,—full of flakes from all that is greatest in preceding literature, ancient or modern."¹

The subject of Milton's indebtedness to Dante has not as yet been treated, as far as I am aware, and this fact may be my excuse for discussing the subject somewhat in detail.

There is no question as to Milton's acquaintance with Dante. He began the study of Italian in 1632 and is said by his biographers to have been saturated with Dante, Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto. In 1638 he went to Italy, and spent the months of August and September in Florence, the birth-place of the Divine Poet.

There is a certain interest,—if no particular value,—in noting the general points of resemblance between the two great religious poets of Italy and England, in life, character and literary activity. Both were scholars, versed deeply in all the learning of their day; both were profoundly religious, stern and severe in their condemnation of sin, and indignant at the corruption of the Church. Both were intensely patriotic and gave themselves up without reserve to serve what they considered the best interests of their country. Both passed the latter half of life in hardship and suffering, the one an exile and a beggar, the other blind. The declining years of Milton, how-

ever, were cheered by a knowledge of his glory as a poet; Dante died in obscurity and his greatest work was known only after his death. Even in the order of their compositions we may find some resemblance between Dante and Milton. The earliest work of each was lyrical, and the *Canzoniere* may be compared to *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro*, and the *Vita Nuova* to *Comus*; while the *De Monarchia* (in which are discussed the relations between Church and State) may be compared to *The Reason of Church Government* and other political and religious tractates of Milton. The resemblance between the *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* will be discussed at length later.

We may assume on *a priori* grounds that Milton would be attracted to the study of Dante. That he did know his works thoroughly is proved by a variety of evidence, such as definite mention, translations of certain passages, and more or less direct references. In the *Reformation in England* he translates the lines in the *Inferno*² on the gift of Constantine to Sylvester :—

Ah Constantine, of how much ill was cause
Not thy conversion, but those rich domains
That the first wealthy pope received of thee,

and in the sonnet to Mr. H. Lawes, "on the publishing his airs," the last three lines contain a reference to that beautiful scene in Purgatory,³ where the poet's friend Casella sings one of Dante's own songs ;—

"Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing,
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory."

So too in *Lycidas* the indignation of St. Peter,—

"The pilot of the Galilean lake,"—

in general tone seems to have been suggested by *Paradiso* xxvii, 22–27, and 40 ff. In both the English and the Italian we find reference to the keys of St. Peter and to the "grim wolf with privy paw" who

² Ahi Constantin, di quanto mal fu matre,
Non la tua conversion, ma quella dote
Che date prese il primo ricco patre,

xix, 115–117.

³ *Purg.* ii, 106 ff.

¹ *Milton's Poetical Works*, edited by David Masson, vol. ii, p. 55.

"Daily devours apace and nothing sed;—⁴

while both end with a prophecy of coming punishment,—

But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once and smite no more;

and

Ma l'alta provvidenza, che con Scipio
Difese a Roma la gloria del mondo,
Soccorrà tosto, sì com'io concipio.⁵

The lines,

The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly.

are a free translation of the lines in *Paradiso* xxix, 106–107,—

Sì che le pecorelle, che non sanno,
Tornan dal pasco pasciute di vento.

The chief evidence of Dante's influence on Milton naturally shows itself in the *Paradise Lost*. That Milton deliberately sought a model upon which to build the poem he had in mind is proved by the passage in *The Reason of Church Government* in which he describes his doubts as to whether he should imitate the epic form exemplified by Homer, Virgil, Tasso and Job, or the drama of Sophocles and Euripides, or the pastoral drama as in the Song of Solomon, or the Apocalypse of Saint John. As Mr. Masson says, this passage is the record of Milton's meditations and hesitations with himself over his great project.⁶ In view of this frank confession concerning a model to imitate, we may take it for granted that the *Divina Commedia* had not occurred to Milton as imitable. Otherwise there would have been some mention of it in the above list.

Indeed Dante's poem is not such a one as could be well imitated in general plan, utterly unlike, as it is, the regular conventional epic of Homer, Vergil, and Tasso. Hence the omission of it in the above list does not prove that Milton was unacquainted with it at the time. On the contrary there seems to be

⁴ Cf. In vesta di pastor lupi rapaci
Sì veggion di quassù per tutti i paschi
Par. xxvii, 55–56.

⁵ Par. xxvii, 61–63.

⁶ Later he jotted down a list of one hundred and eight subjects as suitable for dramatic treatment, of which sixty are from the Scriptures and thirty-three from British history. Here also no mention is made of Dante.

reason to believe that his determination to do something more worthy of his genius than he had hitherto done may have been still further strengthened by his knowledge of a similar determination on the part of Dante after the death of Beatrice. In the Introduction to Book iii of the *Reason of Church Government*, he promises to undertake a poem far in advance of anything he had yet written, and proclaims his purpose, with the help of the Eternal Spirit "who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge," to prepare himself for his great task by

"industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs; till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation from such as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them."

In general temper there seems to be a remarkable similarity here with the closing lines of Dante's *Vita Nuova*:

appresso a questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabil visione, nella quale vidi cose, che mi fecero proporre di non dir più di questa benedetta, infino a tanto che io non potessi più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com' ella sa veracemente, sicché, se piacere sarà di Colui, per cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita per alquanti anni perseveri, spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fu detto d'alcuna. E poi piaccia a Colui, ch'è sire della cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria della sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice che gloriosamente mira nella faccia di Colui, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus*.

It must ever be remembered in discussions of this sort that mere resemblances cannot always be taken as indications of imitation or reference. Much must be attributed to the general stock of ideas and to what I have ventured to call elsewhere the *materia poetica* of the time.⁷ To such I attribute the general similarity between the universe of Dante and Milton, both based on the Ptolemaic system.⁸

⁷ The malicious accusations of Lauder and the exaggerated importance attributed to slight coincidences between Milton and other poets by Todd and Edmundson and others, should warn us to be cautious in such matters. See Masson, "Introduction to *Paradise Lost*," section iv.

⁸ To be more precise, Dante follows the older Ptolemaic System,—Milton adopts the Alphonsine.

To such also may perhaps be attributed the resemblance between the Earthly Paradise of Dante and the Garden of Eden of Milton. Here, however, I am inclined to believe that the memory of Dante's divinely lovely landscape had no little influence on Milton's longer and more modern description. Both are on the top of a high plateau, steep and inaccessible. While, of course, the use of groves and meadows, clear streams, enamelled flowers and singing birds, form the natural material for such descriptions, yet a closer examination of the details of both passages, reveals a number of interesting resemblances. "Th' eternal spring" of Milton in the "primavera sempre" of Dante. "The Graces and the Hours in dance" find a parallel in the

"Ninfe che sì givan sole;"

so Milton's lines

"Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin, gathering flow'rs
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gather'd, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world"

P. L. iv, 268 ff.

make use of the same fable to illustrate a similar description as Dante's

"Tu mi fai rimembrar, dove e qual era
Proserpina nel tempo che perdette
La madre lei ed ella primavera."

Purg. xxviii, 49.

Compare further,—

"The birds their quire apply"

with

Tanto che gli augelletti per le cime
Lasciasser d'operare ogni lor arte,

and, to come down to single words or expressions,—compare the "gentle gales," and the "attune the trembling leaves," of Milton with Dante's "soave dolce," "aura dolce," "le fronde tremolando;"

and

"le foglie
Che tenevan bordone alle sue rime."

The important point to remember here is that all these parallels occur in the space of a few lines and in the description of the same place. No one, moreover, who has felt the beauty of Dante's landscape will think it unreasonable to suppose that Milton had his mind charged with the details thereof, or that reminiscences thereof should be in his mind while writing his own poem.

One of the most striking points of resemblance between the *Divina Commedia* and the *Paradise Lost* is the discussion of questions of theology, philosophy and science, which is to a certain extent a characteristic of both. Thus in Book viii of *Paradise Lost*, Adam inquires concerning the celestial motions and is answered in detail by Raphael. Even the phenomenon of the "spots on the moon," which occupies so large a space in the ii. Canto of *Paradiso*, is also explained by the Angel. The concluding words of the latter to the effect that man should be "lowly wise" and should not be too eager to know of heavenly things which are "too high" for him "to know what passes there," since it is not essential for the performance of man's duty to know the exact truth of all these theories of celestial motions,—

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear,—

remind us of the similar warning by Beatrice against subtilizing theorists, especially preachers, who neglect the plain and simple lessons of the Gospel, in order to gain applause by discussing topics far above their power to comprehend.

Voi non andate giù per un sentiero
Filosofando; tanto vi trasporta
L'amor dell' apparenza e il suo pensiero

.....

Per apparer ciascun s'ingegna, e face
Sue invenzioni, e quelle son trascorse
Dai predicanti, e il vangelo si tace, etc.

Par. xxix, 85 ff.

The general form of these discussions in the *Paradise Lost* is like that of the *Divina Commedia*. The questions asked by Adam, the satisfaction felt at the information given, the new doubts that arise, and the thirst for knowledge never satisfied, ever desiring more and more, remind us involuntarily of Dante in his conversations with Vergil and Beatrice. It is not necessary to give more than a few examples here. Thus compare the following passages.

Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know,—

.....

as one whose drought
Yet scarce allay'd still eyes the current stream,
Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites;

P. L. vii, 61 ff.

What thanks sufficient, or what recompense

Equal have I to render thee, divine
Historian? Who thus largely hast allay'd
The thirst I had of knowledge,
P. L. viii, 5 ff.

Something yet of doubt remains,
Which only thy solution can resolve
Ib. 13-14.

Ed io cui nova sete ancor frugava
Purg. xviii, 4.

Maestro, il mio veder s'avviva
Sì nel tuo lume, ch'io discerno chiaro
Quanto la tua ragion porti o descriva,
Ib. 10-12

"Io son d'esser contento più digiuno
Diss'io, che se mi fossi pria taciuto,
E più di dubbio nella mente aduno,"
Purg. xv, 58-60.

Milton's idea,—(referring to the freedom of the will)

"if I foreknew
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,"—
P. L. iii, 117.

pressed more picturesquely by Dante as follows:—

Tutta è dipinta del cospetto eterno.
Necessità però quindi non prende,
Se non come dal viso, in che si specchia,
Nave che per corrente giù discende,
Par. xvii, 39-42.

The discussion of the beneficent influence of the obliquity of the ecliptic in producing the periodicity of the seasons is found in both Dante and Milton:—

Some say he bid the angels turn askance
The poles of earth
Else had the spring
Perpetual smil'd on earth with verdant flow'rs
Equal in days and nights, except to those
Beyond the polar circles.
P. L. x, 668 ff.

Vedi come da indi si dirama
L'obliquo cerchio

E se la strada lor non fosse torta,
Molta virtù nel ciel sarebbe in vano,
E quasi ogni potenza quaggiù morta.

Par. x, 13 ff.

The differences between Milton's Hell and Dante's Inferno are great,—the former being on a larger scale, vaguely described and impressive in the use of vast distances; the latter being definitely outlined, minutely described and almost geometrical in its details. Still it seems to me as if there must have

been something more than mere coincidence in the use by Milton of

"perpetual storms
Of whirlwind and dire hail,"—

and the wretched souls who

"starve in ice
Their soft ethereal warmth and there to pine
Immovable, infixt and frozen round."

So, too, Dante may have colored, if not suggested, the references to the "harpy-footed furies,"

"Medusa with Gorgonian terror guards
The ford"

and the line

"Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death" sums up many of the fearful aspects of the Inferno. Of course, many of these details were due to Vergil and the Classical authors, but I believe that the *Divina Commedia* was to some extent in Milton's mind as he wrote his description of Hell.

Other points of resemblance are the unconquerable defiance of Satan and Capaneus.
Cf.

That glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me (*Par. Lost*, i, 110);

and

Se Giove stanchi il suo fabbro,— . . .
E me saetti di tutta sua forza,
Non ne potrebbe aver vendetta allegra—
Inf. xiv, 52-60.

Looking down from sky upon the earth far below:—

From hence no cloud, or, to obstruct his sight,
Star interpos'd, however small he sees,
Not unconforn to other shining globes,
Earth, and the garden of God, etc.

Par. Lost, v, 257.

Si ch'io vedea di là da Gade il vâro
Folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito
Nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco,
E più mi fôra scoperto il sito
Di questa aiuola; ma il sol procedea
Sotto i miei piedi.

Par. xxvii, 82.

Also,—

L'aiuola
Tutta m'apparve da' colli alle foci
Par. xxii, 151.

The foul monster Sin in *Paradise Lost* ii, 761,—especially her beauty to those to whom "familiar grown" she

"pleased and with attractive graces won
The most averse."—

reminds us of the siren (symbol of avarice,
gluttony and licentiousness) in *Purg.* xix,

"Io la mirava, . . .
. . . E lo smarrito volto
Come amor vuol, così le colorava,—
lines 10 ff.

E qual meco si ausa
Rado sen parte, si tutto l'appago—
lines 23-24.9

In the change of the fallen angels to snakes
in Book x, of course, Milton found the first
suggestion in Ovid, but the language used
seems to point to some influence on the part
of Dante also.
Cf.

He would have spoke
But hiss for hiss return'd with forked tongue
To forked tongue.
P. L. x, 217;

E la lingua, che avea unita e presta
Prima a parlar, si fende . . .
. . .
Si tuggi sufolando per la valle.
Inf. xxv, 133.

Scorpion and Asp, and Amphisaena dire,
Ceraustes horned, Hydros and Ellops drear,
And Dipsas.

Chelidri, jaculi e fares
Produce, e cenci con amfesi-bena
Inf. xxiv, 86.

Compare further the golden stairs to Heaven
(*P. L.* iii, 501 ff), with the "scala celeste" in
Paradiso xxi, 23 ff. and the grove

"laden with fruit like that
Which grew in Paradise,"—

Whereon the lost souls gazing are

"parcht with scalding thirst and hunger fierce,"
with the mystic trees in Purgatory, at the
sight of which the spirit who here expiates
the sin of gluttony,—

In fame e in sete si rifà santa.
Purg. xxiii, 66.

In regard to resemblances in diction, meta-
phor and ideas, the list is large. Some are
doubtless due to mere coincidence; others,
however, to my mind are more or less con-
scious imitations on the part of Milton. The
following may serve as examples.

on a sudden op'n fly
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound

9 Cf. further lines, 31 ff.

Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder.

P. L. ii, 879.

E quando fùr ne' cardini distorti
. . .
Non ruggiò sì, ne sì mostrò sì acra
Tarpeia

Purg. ix, 133.

Hell trembl'd at the hideous name, and sigh'd
From all her cares.

P. L. ii, 788.

La terra lagrimosa diede vento.

Inf. iii, 133.

Things unattempted yet in prose or rime.

P. L. i, 16,

L'acqua che io prendo giammai non si corse.

Par. ii, 4.

Also *Vita Nuova*,—

Spero di dire di lei quello che
Mai non fu detto d'alcuna.

¶xlili.

With radiant light, as glowing iron with fire,
If metal, part seem'd gold, part silver clear.
Non altrimenti ferro disfavilla
Che bolle.

Par. xxviii, 89.

Qual ferro che bogliente esce del fuoco.

Ibid. i, 60.

accesi
Che ferro più non chiede verun' arte.
Inf. ix, 120a

Pareva argente il d'oro distinto—

Par. xviii, 96.

Satan's spear,—

to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, etc.

P. L. i, 292.

La faccia sua mi pareva lunga e grossa
Come la pina di San Pietro a Roma,

Inf. xxix, 58a

Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
In Vallombrosa.

P. L. i, 302.

Come d'autunno si levano le foglie.¹⁰

Inf. iii, 112.

Blossoms and fruits . . .
. . . with gay enamell'd colours mixt.
P. L. iv, 148.

Oro ed argento fino e cocco e biacca

Fresco smeraldo, etc.

Purg. vii, 73.

Levell'd his evening rays

P. L. iv, 543.

Contra i reggi serotini.

Purg. xv, 141.

10 Cf. Vergil, *Æneid* vi, 309-312.

and twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad.
P. L. iv, 598.

Fosse orizzonte fatto d'un aspetto.¹¹
Purg. xxvii, 71.

Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphire.
P. L. iv, 604.

battlements adom'd
Of living sapphire.
ii, 1049

Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro.
Purg. i, 13.

While thus he spake, th'angelic squadron bright
Turn'd fiery red.
P. L. iv, 977.

Di quel color, che per lo sole avverso
Nube dipinge da sera e da mane,
Vid'io allera (that is, at words of St. Peter) tutto il
ciel coperso.

Par. xxvii, 28.
A wilderness of sweets.
P. L. v, 294.

Ma di soavità di mille odori,
Vi faceva un incognito indistinto,
Purg. vii, 80.

And what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms.
P. L. v, 572.

Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno
.....
..... e piedi e mano
Attribuisce a Dio, ed altro intende.
Par. iv, 40.

Therefore eternal silence be their doom.
P. L. vi, 384.
Non ragioniam di lor ma guarda e passa.
Inf. iii, 51.

So steers the prudent crane
Her annual voyage, borne on winds.
P. L. vii, 430.

E come i gru van cantando lor lai
Facendo in aer di sè lunga riga.
Inf. v, 46.

What seem'd fair in all the world seem'd now
Mean, or in her sunn'd up.
P. L. viii, 472.

Ella è quanto di ben può far natura;
Per esempio di lei beltà si prova.
La Vita Nuova, § xix.

The personification of the sun, turning suddenly his course, at the "tasted fruit" of Adam and Eve, "as from Thystean banquet (*P. L.* 688)" is like that of the river Arno,

11. Cf. also,—

Night's hemisphere had veil'd the horizon round.
P. L. ix, 32.

which, arrived at Arezzo, and disgusted at their currish character,—

"a lor, disdegnosa, torce il muso."
Purg. xiv, 48.

In *P. L.* x, 891, Eve is called "this fair defect of Nature;" so too an ugly body in the *Convito* iii, 4,—is said to be due to a *peccato della natura*. Venus in *P. L.* xi, 589 is "Love's harbinger,"—while in *Purg.* i, 19,—we find it spoken of as

Lo bel pianeta che ad amar conforta.

The description of storm and flood in *P. L.* xi, 737, 6. seems to show reminiscential or coincidental resemblances to Dante's famous description in *Purg.* v, 109 ff.

In conclusion, I may say that in writing this article my purpose has not been to prove in every case cited that Milton directly or indirectly borrowed from Dante, but simply to bring together what seemed to me more or less striking resemblances between the two poets. That Milton was influenced by Dante can, I think, admit of no doubt. The extent of this influence will be a matter of opinion on the part of those who examine the evidence in the case. My function has been to supply, as well as I knew how, the materials which may serve as a basis for such opinions.¹²

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ARISTOTLE AND MODERN TRAGEDY.

THE fact that Aristotle was a scientist who took the whole field of knowledge for his province has become trite with repetition, so that it falls upon our ears as a meaningless phrase. Yet it is a truth which we must constantly bear in mind if we wish really to understand the meaning and the permanent value of his *Poetics*. For, in this little book, which preserves to us nearly all that we know of his æsthetic theory, Aristotle has the same pre-

¹² Lowell in a letter written at Whitby, points out what he considers a strong influence of Dante on Milton's versification, which he says he is convinced, was mainly modeled on the Italian and especially on the *Divina Commedia*. "Many, if not most of his odd constructions are to be sought there, rather than in the Ancients." *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, vol. ii, p. 386. This seems to me to be an exaggerated statement of the facts.